

A VISION FOR CAMP LAEL

By

Jim Davis, Camp Lael Director

It's no secret that traditional camping programs across America are not faring all that well. There is a lot of competition nowadays with sports camps and specialty programs, especially those held on college campuses. The big "mega camps" are also attracting a lot of kids because of all the "cool" things they can afford to offer like BMX bikes and rifle ranges. Also, sadly, because of all the stories you hear on the news, people are becoming reluctant to send their kids to a camp where they don't necessarily know how well their camper will be cared for. Add all that to the fact that the Michigan economy is not so well and you begin to understand the struggle. This is also affecting our beloved Camp Lael or DBC if you prefer.

The good news is that kids are still coming and continue to hear the message of Jesus Christ. In 2005, 295 kids came to our four week program. We had been holding on for about 5 years with the same number of campers. In 2006 and this year we have seen a decrease of about 60 campers. The winter weekend programs have also suffered a decrease of the same proportion. Luckily we are attracting groups outside of the denomination at both our summer and winter programs which helps. Still, numbers are down. Family camps and the kids camp (with an adult partner) are growing. The Family camp this summer used all our cabins. We may consider a second weekend in years to come if the response continues...

The camps financial situation is fragile. The American Baptist Churches annual budget is less and less able to fund the camp. The Region can no longer afford an annual camp deficit. Our 60 year old facility has many needs. Some expenditures cannot be avoided. An example was \$12,000 worth of well repairs and the abandonment of the Kresge well last year. The camp has no endowment funding like Lake Louise. Still, it is a beautiful piece of property and the buildings are in good repair. In the past 20 years over a million dollars has gone into property repairs and upgrades. Some examples include new roofs, all the electrical lines for K/NW put

underground, new windows and doors for many of our buildings, septic repairs, water system repairs and the addition of the Administration center and Northwestern village bath house. We are also in the midst of renovating the chapel and Adopt-A-Cabin which has seen four cabins remodeled and a fifth one just recently adopted. Thank God that even though we are barely making it financially-we are able to continue to fix the place up. This is mostly due to the response we have seen from our churches to fund projects and give to the annual budget. Recently, one of our pastors serving on a Region finance committee, told me to stop worrying about money so much because it wasn't really my problem, but Gods problem. So I continue to rely on the Lord to meet our needs at Camp Lael.

Last year the Lael board of director adopted a new mission statement.

"To be a place of natural beauty, acceptance and Christian Fellowship for the spiritual renewal and growth of all people"

Part of our vision is to offer a facility that meets the needs of all generations of our Baptist family. Traditionally, Camp Lael has been a facility for children and youth. The facility falls short of meeting the needs of large groups and especially adult users. We need to build cabins with bathroom facilities in house. We need to build a separate program building, rather than using the dining hall for large assemblies. These improvements will enable us to attract and serve more groups. It will also attract adult guests and family groups from our ABC family. This should help boost camp usage and solve some of our financial concerns. We also need to work on building an endowment fund for the camp. Churches within the denomination continue to fund our mission. It would be great if this funding keeps growing, but there is no guarantee that it can continue as churches are running into financial troubles of their own.

Put all of the facts and figures aside because it all comes down to this: This summer 16 campers made first time decisions for Christ, 64 kids stated that their lives had taken a turn away from God and that they wanted to start over with Him. 36 campers expressed interest in being baptized and 28 want to become members of their church. 97 kids committed to read their bible daily. 157 campers committed to spending more time daily talking with God. The summer staff did a great job and their lives were touched also. Some will go on to serve the Lord in professional church work. Camp

Lael continues to host the youth leader core program, which has seen many students go back and serve their church in new ways. 550 kids are still coming to our winter weekends. We reach out beyond our Baptist family and serve Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and even Catholic groups. These are the statistics that make me believe in the value of Camp Lael. We are doing a vital ministry in the life of people and our churches. My life was positively touched as a camper in the 1970's and summer staff member in the 1980's. All of this together is why it continues to be my privilege and great honor to serve as director at Camp Lael.

Please be sure to see the Northwestern bathhouse, tour the director house, check out a renovated cabin like NW2 or K2, visit the chapel and see what we are doing there.

We are seeking board members also, so if you feel led by the spirit to serve in that way please see me.